

Members

Sen. Thomas Wyss, Chairperson
Sen. Allen Paul
Sen. Richard D. Young
Sen. Timothy Skinner
Rep. Scott Reske
Rep. Vern Tincher
Rep. Rich McClain
Rep. Lawrence Buell
John Dahman
Lt General Carol Mutter
David M. Lucas
Carol L. Riley



COMMISSION ON MILITARY AND VETERANS AFFAIRS

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MEETING MINUTES¹

Meeting Date: October 9, 2007
Meeting Time: 10:00 A.M.
Meeting Place: State House, 200 W. Washington
St., Room 431
Meeting City: Indianapolis, Indiana
Meeting Number: 1

Members Present: Sen. Thomas Wyss, Chairperson; Sen. Allen Paul; Sen. Timothy Skinner; Rep. Scott Reske; Rep. Vern Tincher; Rep. Rich McClain; Rep. Lawrence Buell; David M. Lucas; Carol L. Riley.

Members Absent: Sen. Richard D. Young; John Dahman; Lt General Carol Mutter.

I. Call to Order and Introduction of Members

Senator Wyss called the meeting to order at 10:09 a.m. and the members of the Military and Veterans' Affairs Commission (Commission) introduced themselves.

¹ Exhibits and other materials referenced in these minutes can be inspected and copied in the Legislative Information Center in Room 230 of the State House in Indianapolis, Indiana. Requests for copies may be mailed to the Legislative Information Center, Legislative Services Agency, 200 West Washington Street, Indianapolis, IN 46204-2789. A fee of \$0.15 per page and mailing costs will be charged for copies. These minutes are also available on the Internet at the General Assembly homepage. The URL address of the General Assembly homepage is <http://www.in.gov/legislative/>. No fee is charged for viewing, downloading, or printing minutes from the Internet.

II. Brigadier General Omer C. Tooley, Indiana National Guard

General Tooley provided the Commission with an update on the Indiana National Guard.² 975 National Guard personnel are currently deployed, and over 3,000 soldiers are preparing to deploy to Iraq by the end of the calendar year.

The Indiana Army National Guard closed out fiscal year (FY) 2007 with a net increase of 1,200 recruits. Indiana ranks fourth in the nation for National Guard recruiting, and the number one and number five nationally ranked recruiters are from Indiana.

For FY 2007, the total federal budget for the National Guard was \$377 million, and the state budget was \$16.67 million. The federal budget was higher than in previous years due to increased funding for Camp Atterbury/Muscatatuck Urban Training Center (CA/MUTC). General Tooley reviewed the various homeland security training exercises and research and development programs conducted at CA/MUTC.

General Tooley also discussed the ongoing transformation of Indiana's Air National Guard. The Terre Haute facility is phasing out its airfield and transitioning to two new projects for which it will receive additional federal funding: (1) The Distributed Ground Station is on schedule to become operational by June 2008. (2) The Air Support Operations Squadron is on track for January 2009. The Fort Wayne facility will be adding 130 personnel by the first quarter of FY 2009.

The Indiana National Guard acquired 1,250 trailers at no cost from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) for use at CA/MUTC. In response to a question from Mr. Lucas concerning the contamination of some FEMA trailers with formaldehyde, General Tooley confirmed that only a small number of the trailers in use at CA/MUTC were contaminated and that those particular trailers are well ventilated and used only for training exercises, not housing.

Representative Tinchler asked whether the families of National Guard members who are deployed are covered by health insurance. General Tooley responded that the members and their families are covered by Tricare, the United States Army's health care plan, while the member serves on active duty.

III. Tom Applegate, Director, Indiana Department of Veterans' Affairs (IDVA)

Mr. Applegate informed the Commission that IDVA is disseminating information about the benefits created in SEA 480-2007 through veterans' organizations. He provided the Commission with copies of brochures detailing the benefits and various IDVA programs.³

The Military and Veterans' Benefit Board⁴ has met three times since its creation in July 2007. The next meeting of the Military and Veterans' Benefit Board was scheduled for October 16 at the Tyndall Armory in Indianapolis.

Mr. Applegate stated that the current balance of the Military Family Relief Fund (MFRF)

²See Exhibit A.

³See Exhibits B - E.

⁴See Exhibit F.

exceeds \$1 million, and the MFRF will receive an additional \$225,000 in state matching funds by end of FY 2008. IDVA has deposited \$500,000 of the MFRF's balance in a certificate of deposit. Grants totaling \$22,000 have been awarded from MFRF to date. Mr. Applegate discussed his concerns about eligibility criteria for grants from the MFRF. Representative Reske asked if the upcoming National Guard deployment will have an effect on the fund, and Mr. Applegate stated that he expects to see an increase in the number of applications.

IV. David Reynolds, Director, State Student Assistance Commission of Indiana (SSACI)

Mr. Reynolds introduced Dennis Obergfell, deputy director of SSACI and director of its grants division, and Laurie Gavrin, SSACI's director of policy and research. Mr. Reynolds discussed the National Guard scholarship extension program created by SEA 480-2007. SSACI has developed an application for scholarships awarded from the scholarship extension program and is in the process of writing rules to administer the program. Mr. Reynolds stated that seven individuals will begin receiving scholarships during the spring 2008 semester.

Mr. Reynolds also provided data for several other scholarship or fee remission programs for the 2006- 2007 school year. 809 scholarships totaling \$2.5 million have been awarded through the Indiana National Guard Supplemental Grant program. 4,731 children of disabled veterans received scholarships or fee remissions totaling \$16.1 million. 265 children of Purple Heart recipients received assistance totaling \$900,000. One spouse of an Indiana National Guard member killed while serving on state active duty received assistance in the amount of \$3,000.

V. Other Business

On behalf of the Military Veterans' Coalition of Indiana (MVCI), Air Force Colonel (Retired) Joe Ryan thanked Senator Wyss and Representative Reske for their roles in the passage of SEA 480-2007 and provided the Commission members with a handout⁵ listing the following MVCI objectives:

- Creating additional funding sources, such as a lottery ticket, for the Veterans' Affairs Trust Fund.
- Providing grants from the Military Family Relief Fund to members of active components of the United States armed forces (rather than just to members of reserve components and the Indiana National Guard).
- Exempting all military income from the state income tax.
- Improving the administration of federal disability claims for veterans.
- Providing a \$1,000 bonus for Indiana residents who have served on active duty in a combat zone during Operation Enduring Freedom or Operation Iraqi Freedom.
- Establishing a \$150,000 death benefit for members of Indiana's military who die in the line of duty.
- Renaming the Indianapolis International Airport the Weir-Cook International Airport to honor Hoosier aviator Harvey Weir Cook.
- Improving the management of the Indiana Veterans' Home.

Gerald Modlin, a volunteer service officer with the Vietnam Veterans of America, offered his opinion that there should be a standing legislative committee focusing solely on

⁵See Exhibit G.

veterans' issues. Senator Wyss and Representative Tinchler assured Mr. Modlin that the existing standing committees devote significant resources to veterans' issues even if the committees' names include other topics. Representative Buell questioned Mr. Modlin about his role as a volunteer service officer. Mr. Modlin responded that he assists veterans in filing claims with the United States Department of Veterans Affairs. Mr. Applegate stated that IDVA trains service officers in each county other than Marion County.

Senator Wyss did not schedule another meeting but stated that the Commission would file an informational report with the Legislative Council by November 1, 2007.

VI. Adjournment

Senator Wyss adjourned the meeting at 11:40 a.m.